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ABSTRACT

Self-appraisals are thought to play an important role in a number of youth problem behaviors. Self-perceived competence in the parental role may be an important mediator of family interventions. The purpose of the study described was to determine whether parental self-efficacy is causally related to effective child rearing. To do so, the authors analyzed data from several large-sample trials of a family intervention that focused on improving parent and child self-appraisals, among other outcomes. In both trials, parent self-efficacy increased significantly. Both punishment and coercive interactions declined. The role of self-efficacy as a mediator was examined through regression analyses. Baseline self-efficacy was not a significant predictor of changes in child rearing, but the baseline child rearing measure was. Across both trials and all outcome measures, changes in self-efficacy accounted for significant variance in improved child rearing. Thus, the intervention resulted in improved self-efficacy, and such changes explained improved parenting skills. (GCP)

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Parent Self-Efficacy Mediates the Impact of Family Intervention

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ED 480 095

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Poster presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, August 2003.

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Self-appraisals are thought to play an important role in a number of youth problem behaviors (Meggert, 1996), although much of this literature is correlational. A recent meta-analysis of 116 intervention studies found that programs focused on modifying self-esteem were more effective in altering problem behaviors or academic skills, as compared to interventions without an emphasis on self-appraisals (Haney & Durlak, 1998). Yet some skeptics assert that such an emphasis is ultimately harmful because it promotes narcissism at the expense of family health (Burr & Christensen, 1992). Some of the confusion about the role of self-appraisals is conceptual: Self-esteem has less to do with selfishness than with affective judgments about one's worth whereas self-efficacy, which is the focus of our study, is a construct grounded in mastery.

Self-perceived competence in the parental role may be an important mediator of family interventions: It correlates with concurrent measures of child-rearing practices (MacPhee et al., 1996), regardless of culture, and predicts changes in parenting skill (Spoth et al., 1995). Our purpose was to determine whether parent self-efficacy is causally related to effective child rearing. To do so, we analyzed data from several large-sample trials of a family intervention that focused on improving parent and child self-appraisals, among other outcomes.

The initial demonstration project included 363 at-risk families who were recruited into the DARE to be You program (Miller-Heyl et al., 2001), assigned at random to intervention and control groups, and completed follow-up assessments one year later. The replication trial included 258 families who also were assigned at random and completed one-year follow-ups. Attrition was less than 10%. The two trials were implemented at sites differing in population density and ethnicity, and with different staff. The same curriculum was followed, which involved 24 hours of workshops (over 12 weeks) that included many experiential and discussion-based exercises related to self-appraisals, communication, discipline, and decision making. It is

important to note that there was less fidelity to protocol in the replication trial, which was both a blessing – it allowed a better test of the mediational power of self-efficacy because treatment effects were less evident – and a curse, because weaker main effects on parenting skills were observed.

Across both samples, the mothers had a mean age of 30 years, and had 12.6 years of education. Their preschool children were 3.83 years old on average. Annual income was lower in the initial demonstration project ($14,500) as compared to the replication that began 6 years later ($21,000). Ethnicity differed in the two projects as well: 29% Native American in CSAP1 v. 60% in CSAP2; and 45% Anglo in CSAP1 v. 17% in CSAP2. Hispanic families constituted 22% of each sample.

Parent self-efficacy was measured with the Self-Perceptions of the Parental Role scale (MacPhee, Benson, & Bullock, 1986), a 6-item scale with good evidence for its validity and sound reliabilities ($\alpha > .80$). Child-rearing practices were measured with several self-report measures and responses to vignettes; we focus on the Limit Setting scale from the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (Gerard, 1994) and a set of items related to frequency of punishment and criticism ($\alpha > .75$). The other outcome measure for this study was a 10-item measure of coercive parent-child interactions ($\alpha = .85$).

First, we examined the main effects of the intervention. In both trials, parent self-efficacy increased significantly ($ES = .49$ in Tr1, $p < .001$; $ES = .30$ in Tr2, $p = .07$); effective limit setting did in the demonstration trial ($ES = .59$; $p < .001$) but not the replication ($ES = .26$). Both punishment ($ES = .47$ in Tr1, $p < .0001$; $ES = .33$ in Tr2, $p < .05$) and coercive interactions ($ES = .34$ in Tr1; $ES = .35$ in Tr2; $p < .05$) declined. The role of self-efficacy as a mediator was examined through regression analyses (see Table 1). In the first step, the baseline measures of

self-efficacy and parenting (e.g., limit setting; punishment; coercion) were entered, followed by treatment group and then *change* in self-efficacy. Regardless of trial and outcome measure, baseline self-efficacy was not a significant predictor of changes in child rearing but the baseline child rearing measure was. Consistent with the repeated measures MANOVAs above, treatment condition was highly significant in the demonstration trial but was a less powerful predictor of change in the replication. Across both trials and all outcome measures, changes in self-efficacy accounted for significant variance in improved child rearing (5-14% of the variance; $p < .0001$), even after accounting for exposure to the DTBY program. Thus, the intervention resulted in improved self-efficacy, and such changes explained improved parenting skills.

A notable, trial-specific effect was observed: The unique effect of improved self-efficacy was observed only in the treatment group in the demonstration trial, but was observed in both groups in the (weaker) replication trial. Again, this points to a central role of self-efficacy because even when the intervention had minimal main effects on child rearing, improved self-appraisals did predict better parenting skills. Such findings reinforce the importance of family interventions attending to self-appraisal processes (Haney & Durlak, 1998), which might work because depression is buffered and persistence at the difficult task of parenting is nurtured.

However, in another DTBY trial with a sample of teen mothers, little impact was observed on self-efficacy or child-rearing practices. More importantly, changes in self-efficacy were generally *not* related to improved parenting skills. Using structural equation modeling, we found that problematic child behavior and maternal distress were directly related to hostile parenting – not mediated by parent self-efficacy. Thus, for some high-risk parents, intervention should focus on basic skills of behavior management and emotion regulation, with less emphasis on promoting self-efficacy.

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Table 1
Improved Parent Self-Efficacy Predicts Better Parenting Skills

Predictor	Harsh Punishment		Limit Setting		Coercion	
	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2
			CSAP1			
Step 1 (Baseline)		.26		.19		.22
Parent self-efficacy	-.06		.02		-.08	
Parenting measure	-.54***		-.44***		-.49***	
Step 2		.31		.26		.24
Treatment group	.21***		-.28***		.13	
Step 3		.36		.31		.28
Δ in self-efficacy	-.31***		.27***		-.24***	
			CSAP2			
Step 1 (Baseline)		.34		.30		.30
Parent self-efficacy	.02		.14**		-.05	
Parenting measure	-.58***		-.59***		-.57***	
Step 2		.35		.30		.30
Treatment group	.10**		-.02		.08	
Step 3		.41		.41		.36
Δ in self-efficacy	-.26***		.38***		-.26***	

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